



M O N T A N A  
C O A L I T I O N   A G A I N S T  
D O M E S T I C   A N D   S E X U A L  
V I O L E N C E

To: House Judiciary Committee  
From: Jennifer Hill-Hart, Montana Coalition Against Domestic & Sexual Violence  
Date: March 27, 2007  
Re: SB 447 – Victims Rights

EXHIBIT 8  
DATE 3/27/07  
SB 447

Good morning, Madame Chair and Members of the House Judiciary Committee. For the record, my name is Jennifer Hill-Hart and I represent the Montana Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence. We are a membership-based organization representing domestic and sexual violence advocacy programs from across the state of Montana. We rise in support of Senate Bill 447.

Currently Montana statute requires that victims of crime receive immediate services in response to the crime that has been committed against them. However, victims of crime have greater difficulty receiving detailed information about their case from the criminal justice system than the offenders. MCADSV recognizes that a defendant has the right to receive information about a case being brought against him or her. Victims are not as privy to the information as those directly involved in the prosecution of a case. MCADSV sees this as extremely unfortunate. We believe this is only the case because people are not aware of victims' restricted access to information. There is no reason why access to information should not be made available to all parties affected by the crime. SB 447 changes current policy in order to make this common sense right an actuality.

SB 447 continues offering support to victims of crime in Montana by recognizing the benefit of allowing victims to have an advocate present when being interviewed about the offense. Most victims of domestic and sexual violence have had little, if any, encounter with the criminal justice system until victimized by an offender. It can be a very frightening and intimidating experience for someone who has been abused, and thus traumatized, to not only tell the details of a terribly frightening and often humiliating situation, but to have to tell and retell the details to complete strangers. Oftentimes, victims relive the experience and are thus re-traumatized each time they are required to recall the events that transpired against them, particularly when the victims are children.

MCADSV recognizes that it is important for victims to tell and retell what happened. What we ask is that you support SB 447 and thus support those victims whose reasonable request is that they have a support system nearby. With a victim advocate present, a victim is less terrified, is more likely to provide succinct testimony, and feels support from the criminal justice system that otherwise can make a victim feel like a piece of evidence.

Thank you for your time and attention. Please support SB 447 and allow Montana to continue to support victims of crime with equal access to information and through a show of support for those who need it most. If you have questions, I am available to provide further information.

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